INYO COUNTY
FREE LIBRARY

A BARRACK BECOMES A HOME

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
MANZANAR, CALIFORNIA

A BARRACK BECOMES A HOME

A cooperative project in Homemaking by the students of the Home Economics and Woodshop Departments of the Manzanar Secondary School

Prepared by

Beatrice H. White
Home Economics Supervisor
Manzanar Secondary Schools

May 1, 1945

A BARRACK BECOMES A HOME

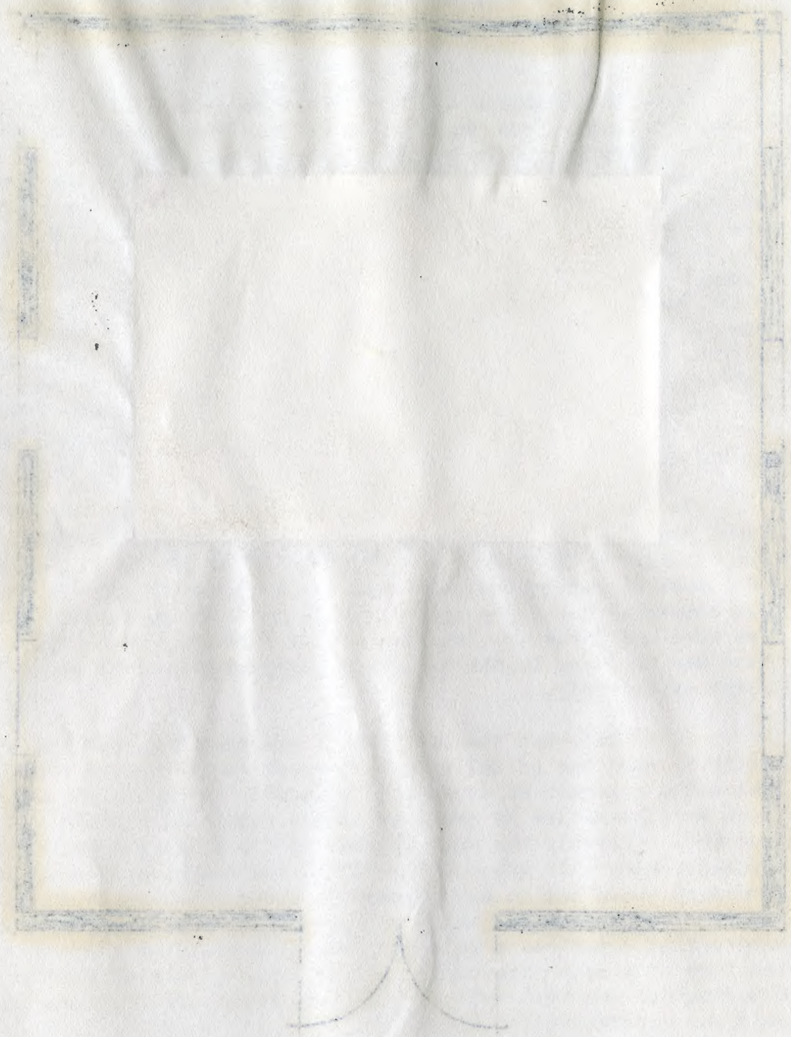
When the Japanese American families were sent to the Manzanar Relocation Center from the Western Defense Zone, they were housed in wooden barracks of temporary construction. The buildings were arranged in block units. Each block consisted of fifteen barracks, one mess hall, a common laundry room, and latrines. The barracks were 100 feet long and 20 feet wide. They were covered on the outside with black tar paper and lined with plaster board. Each barrack was divided into rooms, the size depending upon the size of the family that was to occupy it. Each family was given one room which might range in size from 8 feet by 20 feet to 28 feet by 20 feet. There were no partitions within the family room, and no cupboards, or storage space of any kind. The only furniture available was a single army cot for each member of the family. Thus for the students of the Manzanar Secondary School the word "home" implied an empty barrack room.

It has been felt by many authorities that this lack of a normal home situation has had a more detrimental influence on the young people of the camp than any other phase of the evacuation. Under such circumstances, the need for training in all fields of home economics was far greater than in the average school. Facilities were available for the teaching of foods and clothing, but there was no place in which general homemaking courses could be taught effectively.

It seemed that the only way to overcome this difficulty was to try to make one of the typical barrack rooms into an apartment that would approach an acceptable standard for an American home. There were obstacles to overcome before such a plan could be executed. Probably the most serious of these was the shortage of necessary materials and equipment, and the cumbersome government procedure which had to be followed in order to obtain even the smallest item. However, the head teachers in the home economics and woodworking departments felt that the plan could be carried out in the form of a cooperative project for the students of the two departments, and that the work involved would offer an excellent learning experience for them.

The plan was presented to the students and it met with an enthusiastic response. This spirit of cooperation carried on through the entire project and was largely responsible for its satisfactory conclusion.

A TYPICAL MANZANAR BARRACK ROOM
20'-0" × 24'-0"



A TYPICAL MANZANAR BARRACK ROOM
20'-0" x 24'-0"

The work was developed by means of individual projects. Some of the work was done during class hours and some was done after school and counted toward the usual home project required of vocational courses.

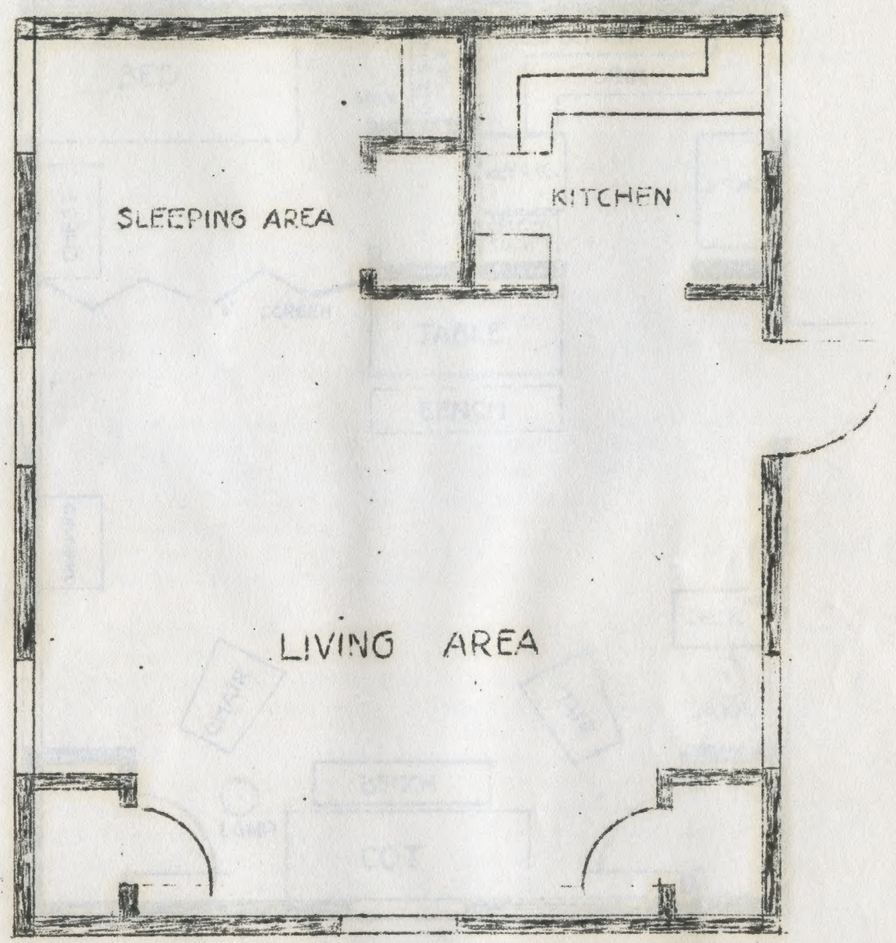
The work was based on the following units:

1. Requirements for good housing
2. Study of house plans
3. Selection of home equipment
   a. Standards for price
   b. Beauty
   c. Utility
4. Construction of
   a. Simple furniture
   b. Slip covers
   c. Chair cushions
   d. Curtains
   e. Lamp shades

An average barrack room 20 feet by 24 feet was selected for the apartment. The large garage-like doors on the south end were sealed and a door cut into the east wall replacing a small high window which was used to make an opening in the south wall. This change provided for a sunny southern exposure during the winter months, and the entrance, having been placed away from the prevailing winds, gave protection from frequent sand storms. It also added to the functional qualities of the room by bringing the door near the food preparation center.

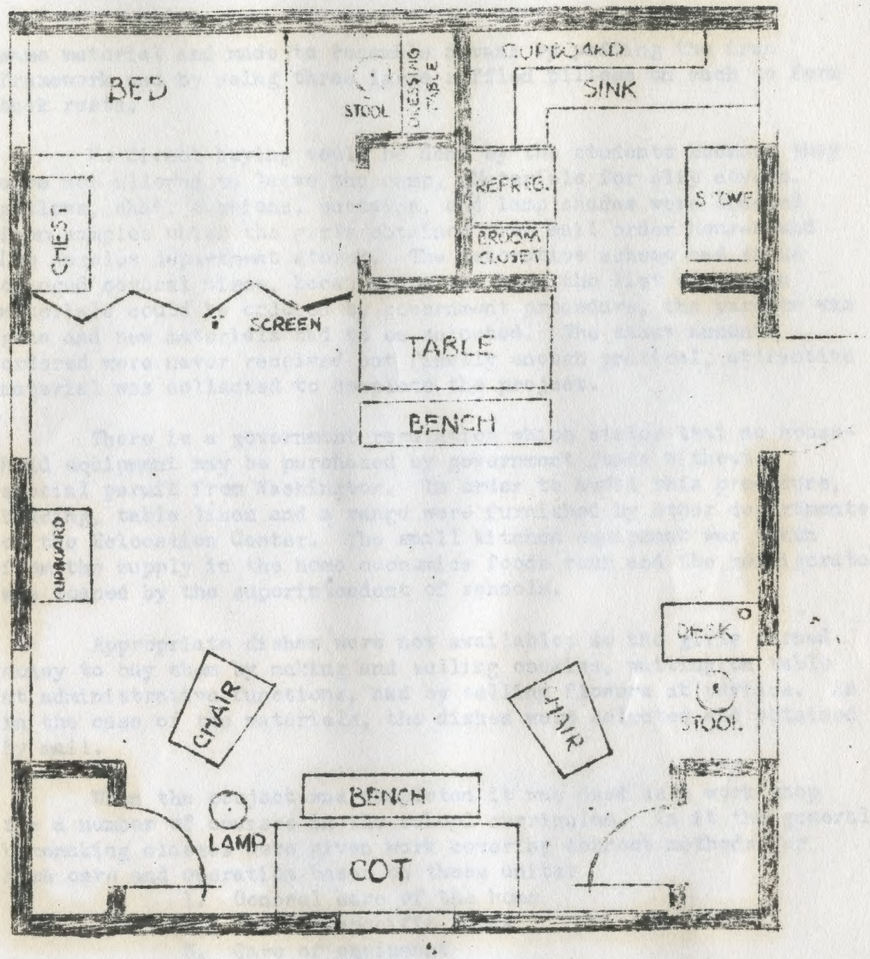
Storage space was gained by partitioning off three closets, by building cupboards in the kitchen and wall shelves in the living and sleeping area. The closets were placed where they would not detract from the usable floor space, and where they would add interest to the apartment by breaking the monotony of the four walls. The wall shelves were designed and built so as to be an integral part of the decorative scheme. The kitchen and closets were separated from the living room by full partitions but the bedroom alcove was closed off by the use of folding screens. When the screens were placed against the walls the two areas became one spacious room where large groups could gather for school work or for social activities.

After the structural changes were completed, simple sturdy furniture was built by the boys in the woodshop under the supervision of evacuee instructors. They made a table and two benches, one of which was used as a coffee table when not in use with the dining unit, a single drawer desk, a large chest, a cupboard, a dressing table, an end table, and two large arm chairs. An army cot in the living area and a folding bed in the bedroom alcove provided for comfortable lounging. They were slip covered in the

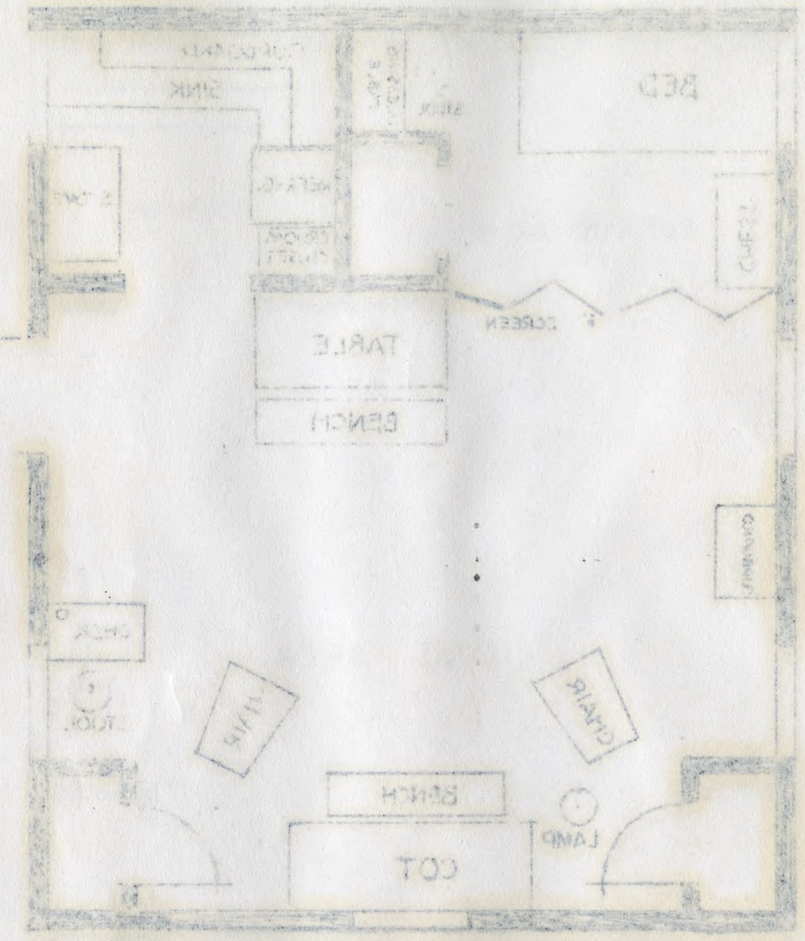


STRUCTURAL CHANGES

South door sealed and replaced by window
Window in east wall replaced by door
Partitions added to form kitchen and closet space
Sink and Cupboard installed in the kitchen



THE BARRACK HOME COMPLETED



THE BARRACK HOME COMPLETED

same material and made to resemble divans by padding the iron framework and by using three large ruffled pillows on each to form back rests.

No direct buying could be done by the students because they were not allowed to leave the camp. Materials for slip covers, pillows, chair cushions, curtains, and lamp shades were ordered from samples which the girls obtained from mail order houses and Los Angeles department stores. The decorative scheme had to be changed several times, because, by the time the list of chosen materials could be ordered by government procedure, the yardage was gone and new materials had to be selected. The exact amounts ordered were never received but finally enough pratical, attractive material was collected to complete the project.

There is a government regulation which states that no household equipment may be purchased by government funds without a special permit from Washington. In order to avoid this procedure, bedding, table linen and a range were furnished by other departments of the Relocation Center. The small kitchen equipment was taken from the supply in the home economics foods room and the refrigerator was loaned by the superintendent of schools.

Appropriate dishes were not available; so the girls earned money to buy them by making and selling cookies, waiting on table at administrative functions, and by selling flowers at parties. As in the case of the materials, the dishes were selected and obtained by mail.

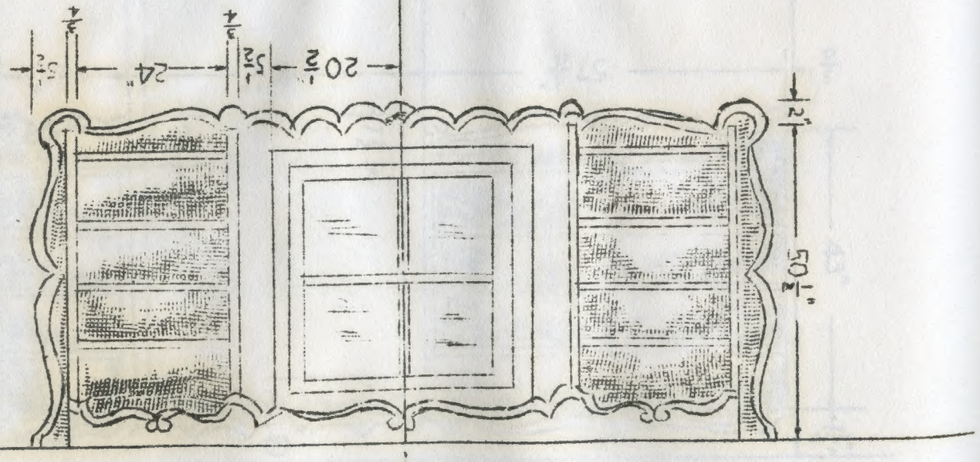
When the project was completed it was used as a work shop for a number of courses in the school curriculum. In it the general homemaking classes were given work covering correct methods for home care and operation based on these units:

1. General care of the home
2. Care of specific rooms
3. Care of equipment
4. A budget for operating a home

It was not advisable for the girls to stay over night in the apartment; so, in order to give them practical experience, each week a group of four girls was assigned to care for the apartment, and they were graded on the standard of their work. The unit on family meal service offered to the food classes was given in the apartment, and a bride's course was scheduled there by the Adult Education Department. Aside from regular school work, the room was used by the girls of the Home Economics Club as a place in which to carry on their regular meetings and their social activities.

One of the most persistant fears in the minds of the evacuee parents was that their children would not have the advantage of a

SOUTH WINDOW



same material and made to resemble drawers by bending the iron frame in such a manner that the lines appear to form rectangles. Paint or varnish to match the rest of the furniture.

To direct paying could be done by the students pasting pictures of various furniture, etc. from old catalogs, magazines and books on the bulletin board. Information for all types covers, pillows, chairs, couches, curtains, and just about anyone would enjoy looking through old catalogs and finding pictures of things they would like to have in their own homes. Pictures could be mounted on construction paper and displayed on the bulletin board.

When the project was completed it was used as a work unit for a number of courses in the school curriculum. In it the General Homemaking classes were given work covering correct methods for home care and operation based on these units:

1. General care of the home
2. Care of equipment
3. Care of specific rooms
4. A budget for operating a home

It was not advisable for the girls to stay over night in the apartment; so, in order to give them practical experience, each week a group of four girls were assigned to care for the apartment, and they were graded on the standard of their work. The unit on Household Service offered to the food classes was given in the apartment, and a price's course was scheduled there by the Adult Education Department. Aside from regular school work, the room was used by the Girls of the Home Economics Club as a place in which to carry on their regular meetings and their social activities.

One of the most interesting items in the minds of the average person was that their children would not have the advantages

Appropriate dishes were not available; so the girls ordered some of the pink dishes with a simple cookie, muffins on apple blossoms, and pink and green colored bon bons. As it is the General Homemaking and made to resemble drawers by bending the iron same material and made to resemble drawers by bending iron frame in such a manner that the lines appear to form rectangles. Paint or varnish to match the rest of the furniture.

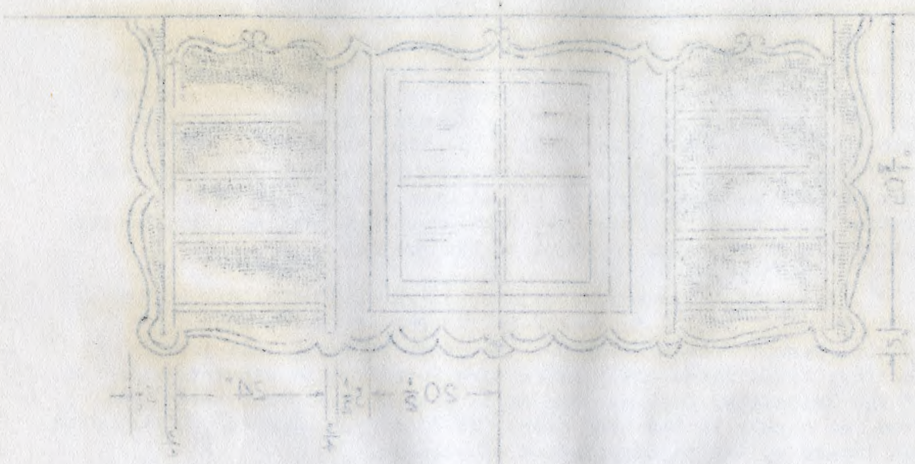
To direct paying could be done by the students pasting pictures of various furniture, etc. from old catalogs, magazines and books on the bulletin board. Information for all types covers, pillows, chairs, couches, curtains, and just about anyone would enjoy looking through old catalogs and finding pictures of things they would like to have in their own homes. Pictures could be mounted on construction paper and displayed on the bulletin board.

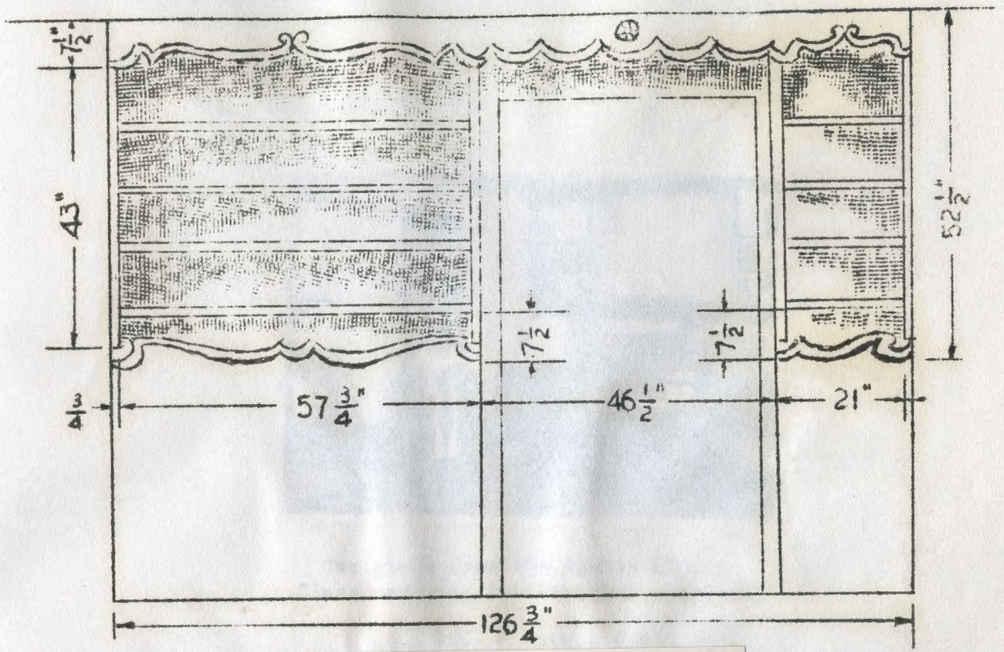
When the project was completed it was used as a work unit for a number of courses in the school curriculum. In it the General Homemaking classes were given work covering correct methods for home care and operation based on these units:

1. General care of the home
2. Care of equipment
3. Care of specific rooms
4. A budget for operating a home

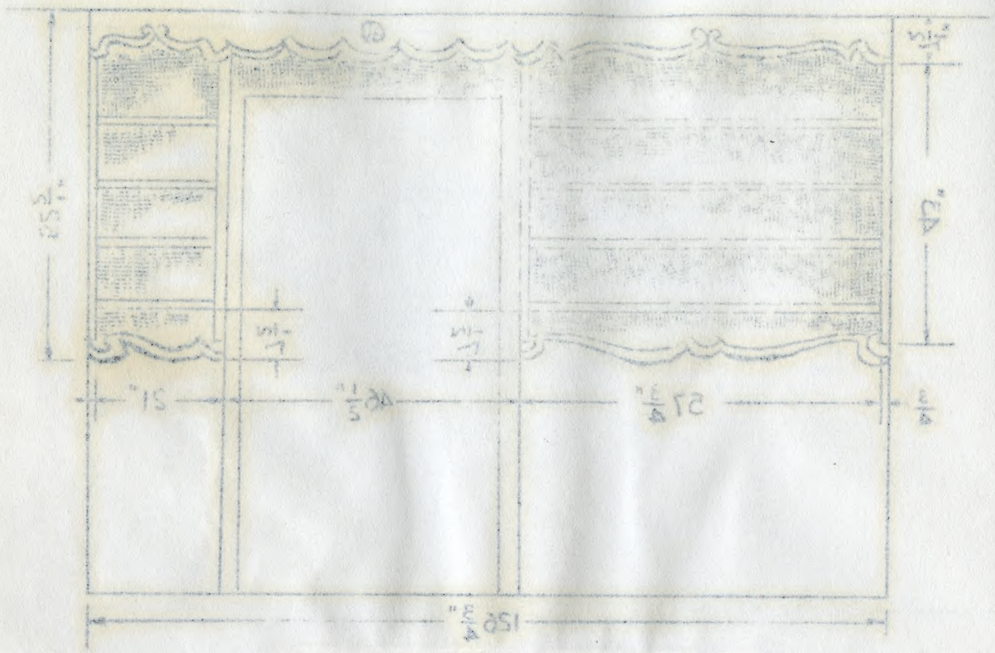
It was not advisable for the girls to stay over night in the apartment; so, in order to give them practical experience, each week a group of four girls were assigned to care for the apartment, and they were graded on the standard of their work. The unit on Household Service offered to the food classes was given in the apartment, and a price's course was scheduled there by the Adult Education Department. Aside from regular school work, the room was used by the Girls of the Home Economics Club as a place in which to carry on their regular meetings and their social activities.

One of the most interesting items in the minds of the average person was that their children would not have the advantages





N. WALL LEADING TO KITCHEN



N. WALL LEADING TO KITCHEN

Two girls from the Family Living
Class enjoying the finished apartment

normal school situation, and they were always interested in any apparent progress in school work. The Barrack Home was opened for their inspection, and the obvious pride with which the students displayed their work was reflected in the faces of the parents. Not only parents but personnel from all departments of the Relocation Center visited the apartment and, in many instances, borrowed ideas for bettering their own housing conditions.

Work on the Barrack Home was not only highly beneficial to the pupils but also filled a definite need in the camp. The only regret was, that because of delays in procurement, the apartment was available for only one school year instead of the entire three years of the student life at Manzanar.